

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Looks Gourmet Food Company

Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Maine MEP Shows Look's Gourmet They 'Can' Boost Business

Client Profile:

Look's Gourmet Food Company produces and markets seafood meats such as clams, lobster, mussels, as well as seafood dips and spreads, New England-style chowders, seafood bisques, pasta and seafood sauces, and gourmet baked beans. The company was founded in 1917 by William M. Look who developed the first successful process for handling and canning crabmeat and lobster, a process that the company still uses today. Look's Gourmet Food Company employs 25 people in Whiting, Maine.

Situation:

President and CEO Mike Cote bought the company in 2003 and wanted to keep many of the canning methods in place while taking the operation in a slightly different direction. In less than four years, Cote and co-owner Cynthia Fisher, converted an old canning company into a gourmet foods company. They made some label modifications, pulled old recipe records and made a few revisions, but wanted to make sure the authentic Maine product still resonated with customers. They knew they had a thriving business on their hands, but since they were still doing things almost the same way since 1917, the output was not optimal. Also, as part of their production process, Look's employees generated significant shell waste, after they picked the meat from the lobsters, mussels and clams. As their business began to grow, owners Fisher and Cote decided they would need to move into a bigger warehouse and asked the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for assistance.

Solution:

Maine MEP began by using the Time Wise® principles of lean manufacturing to train all employees, followed by Value Stream Mapping and Kaizen events to find the waste in their processes and eliminate as much as possible. They were able to move into a 12,000-square foot warehouse with assistance from a Community Development Block Grant program. The new warehouse layout was designed with lean manufacturing in mind, reducing travel distances, using visual controls for ease of locating each product. Fortunately, another Maine business saw the discarded shells as a valuable resource. Instead of having the mussel shells go to waste, Look's was brought together with Artful Wares, another Maine MEP client, that manufactures silverware handles and textiles out of crushed Maine shells. Maine MEP suggested that there was an opportunity for the two to create a profitable side business.

Artful Wares and Look's are developing a side business where the waste shells will be cleaned, crushed, packaged, and sent to Artful Wares rather than being trucked to a landfill. They are now taking what used to be waste and recycling it for use in the silverware and textiles that Artful Wares produces. During the Lean training, a positive change was noticed in employee morale. They began working as one cohesive unit with an understanding that each task was integral to the big picture. The new mindset has had very positive results. They went from making seven batches a day for one

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product to 27 batches a day. Additionally, seven new jobs were created.

Results:

- * Increased profit by 80 percent.
- * Increased production from 7 batches a day to 27 batches a day.
- * Created 7 jobs.
- * Improved value added per employee.

Testimonial:

"We have learned so much from the Maine MEP. Our business has grown 80 percent over the past year and we will probably see another increase this year. Because of Lean, our bottom line has increased, but more importantly, our employees now feel ownership of our brand and we know we will continue to use these Lean techniques for years to come."

Cynthia Fisher, Owner